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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1057  
INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE  
RUEHMK/AMEMBASSY MANAMA PRIORITY 0002  
RUEHEG/AMEMBASSY CAIRO PRIORITY 0005  
RUEHAD/AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI PRIORITY 0001  
RUEHDE/AMCONSUL DUBAI PRIORITY 0002  
RUEHAM/AMEMBASSY AMMAN PRIORITY 0005  
RUEHLB/AMEMBASSY BEIRUT PRIORITY 0005  
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SIPDIS

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BAGHDAD FOR FCS-FRANK CARRICO, ECON-RICHARDS, POL-HOLT,  
PAO-NANTONGO AMMAN FOR FCS - PLEASE PASS TO AMCHAM BEIRUT FOR  
FCS - PLEASE PASS TO AMCHAM CAIRO FOR FCS - PLEASE PASS TO  
AMCHAM DUBAI FOR FCS - PLEASE PASS TO AMCHAM MANAMA FOR FCS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [ECIN](#) [ECON](#) [KPAO](#) [SOCI](#) [SCUL](#) [IZ](#)  
SUBJECT: REGIONAL TRAVEL DIFFICULTIES LEAD TO NAJAF TOURISM  
CONFERENCE POSTPONEMENT

REF: HILLAH 000019

11. (SBU) SUMMARY. The Najaf Provincial Council Tourism Committee, chaired by Sheikh Fayed al-Shimerti, reluctantly decided to postpone the April 5-6 Najaf Tourism Conference (reftel) for exactly one month in the wake of country-wide disruptions from the recent Basrah offensive. The conference is now scheduled for May 5-6 and will incorporate all of the elements planned for the originally slated dates. The Tourism Committee postponed the conference to ensure full participation from Iraqi and regional participants, and not because of any Najaf province security concerns. END SUMMARY.

12. (SBU) Sheikh Fayed also chairs the Provincial Council's Security Committee and held multiple meetings with Najaf's Iraqi Police and Army commanders over the past week. Najaf remained calm with little violence throughout the fall-out from the Basrah offensive and its corresponding violence and unrest in Baghdad and elsewhere in South-Central Iraq. Najaf Sadr Trend sympathizers took to the streets in peaceful protest but engaged specifically in Muqtada al-Sadr's call for civil disobedience, brandishing Korans and olive branches. Sheikh Fayed based his decision, after close consultations with PRT Team Leader, not on Najaf security concerns but concern about the impact of Gulf and other international participants of limited access to Basrah and Baghdad airports, plus difficult travel conditions for Iraqi government, provincial, and private sector invitees.

13. (SBU) Sheikh Fayed specifically told PRT Team Leader that invited tourism professors from Baghdad's Mustansiriyah University and scheduled Iraqi fashion performers were not able to arrive from Baghdad, and that most of the invited regional attendees could not fly through Basrah airport as initially planned. Without these crucial components, Sheikh Fayed considered a postponement necessary. Sheikh Fayed and the Provincial Council announced the reason for the conference's postponement was to increase international and business participation, not because of Najaf security concerns.

14. (SBU) COMMENT. Throughout the recent unrest in Iraq, the PRT and the Tourism Committee remained in constant contact about the conference and provincial security conditions. Sheikh Fayed, a senior and well-respected PC member, has been completely open in discussing security concerns and the tourism conference. Sheikh Fayed's Committee prepared a successful

conference concept and multi-faceted means to showcase Najaf and encourage investment in the province's tourism potential. Both he and the PRT considered Najaf safe and secure enough to hold the conference on April 5-6 but also agreed the need for fuller international and Iraqi participation. Despite the month long delay, we expect the Najaf Tourism Conference to be an important activity stressing opportunity and hope for Najaf's future. END COMMENT.

SIMMONS